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ABSTRACT

This paper begins by discussing David Matza's concept of "Drift" as a causal factor in violence and delinquent behavior. Matza's theory of delinquency contends that youth are prone to feelings of injustice, neutralization, preparation, and desperation. According to Matza, no one characteristic of the potential delinquent is sufficient, although each characteristic is necessary to delinquent acts. This theory of delinquency explains upper as well as lower class delinquency, urban and rural delinquency, and it explains why delinquents are not delinquent all the time, and why non-delinquents are delinquents some of the time. The second part of the paper discusses the specific role the school plays both in terms of its own internal institutional functions and as a representative of the general society. Schools view certain patterns of behavior as acceptable and desirable. Children who come from those sorts of surroundings or have those characteristics in their lives as those found in the greater society find it easier to conform to school rules. However, children from crowded and noisy environments are viewed as disruptive in the school for behaviors which are considered normal outside of the school. This paper contends that this discrepancy in roles as played outside of the school and inside of it increases the potentiality for drift. Results of three studies investigating the relationship between what happens in the school and what happens in violence and delinquency indicate that the school does indeed have the potential of creating its own internal violence, delinquency, and vandalism. (Author/AM)

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DRIFT, VIOLENCE, AND THE SCHOOLS

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This paper will cover two general topics:

1. David Matza's concept of "Drift" (Delinquency and Drift)[1] as a casual factor in violence and delinquent behavior.

2. The specific role the school plays both in terms of it's own internal institutional functions and as a representative of the general society.

The Concept of Drift.

David Matza, in his Delinquency and Drift, presents the theory of how a person becomes delinquent:

His formulation is different from many of the other criminologists in that his is not a lower class subcultural theory of delinquency. Rather, Matza contends the causes of delinquency and violence are the same regardless of social class. This is not to say that all of the forms of delinquency are the same for assuredly they are not. Delinquency as exhibited in the urban scene particulary among the poor is different from delinquency as exhibited in the rural or even the suburban wealthier scene. This however, as Durkheim has pointed out, does not mean that there is less delinquency or that it is less frowned upon, but merely that the specific behaviors went so far as to say (The Rules of Sociological Method)[2] that if all of the present crimes were eliminated, the society would replace them with other crimes. What needs to be pointed out here is that delinquency, violence, and crime are societally defined and what would be considered totally unacceptable behavior in one situation would be perfectly acceptable for the same individual in another situation. For example, on the basis of Biblical scholarship as well as good deal of historical precedent, it

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1. Matza, David, Delinquency and Drift, Wiley, New York, 1964

2. Durkheim, Emile, The Rules of Sociological Method, Trans. Sarah Solovay and John Mueller, ed. George Catlin, The Free Press, Glencoe, IL 1950

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is quite clear that the dictum, "Thou shalt not Kill" was meant to apply to other Hebrews of an individuals tribe. Killing Hebrews of other tribes was sometimes acceptable and killing members of other cultures and societies was not only a crime but was often praised. The point is that the individual was the same but the situation was different and therefore, the rules were different.

Society, then, has different rules for the same individual in different situations. Further, it appears to be clear that delinquency, violence, and crime will always be with us, it is only the definition that will change. There is some reason to assume that if we really wanted to lower the delinquency rate, one way to do it would be to revert to the definition of delinquency that held in the 1930 and 40's. At that time, delinquents were those who had committed crimes which would have made them adult criminals had they been adults. If we would eliminate all of the status offenses (those crimes which apply only to children such as truancy, runaway, etc.) and all of the dependency cases. we would cut our juvenile case rate by 75 percent.

David Matza attempts to generate a theory of delinquency which explains upper as well as lower class delinquency, urban and rural, why delinquents are not delinquent all the time, and why non-delinquents are delinquent some of the time.

Matza's theory, in brief, is as follows

All people have contact with and take their orientation from the predominant culture (in our case, middle-class culture). This is not to say that all people are the same, but rather, as Merton,[1] and Cohen[2] have pointed out, that everyone desires these values. This has become even more prevailent with the information-leveling affect of the media.

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1. Merton, Robert K. Social Theory and Social Structure, Houghton Mifflin, 1960
2. Cohen, Albert K. Delinquent Boys: The Culture of The Gang, Free Press NY, 1955

The Sense of Injustice and Neutralization

According to most children almost everything in their lives is either unfair or unjust particularly with regard to the use of the car, time to be home and whose turn it is to do the dishes. These, in general, do not lead to violence, crime or delinquency. However, most children at some time or another, are sufficiently distressed by what they see to be injustice or unfairness that they feel compelled to act out in some way or another. The sense of injustice finds most youths at some time or another. When this sense of injustice builds to a high point, the juvenile comes to view his world as a place where the rules do not seem to hold. This process Matza calls neutralization, that is, temporarily neutralizing society's hold on the individual, and thereby allowing the dominant values to be superseded.

This causes a state which Matza calls Drift.

Drift is no more easily defined than is anomie. It is a general feeling that the world is not right in its dealings with me. It is a lowering of the more common social inhibitors. It is not however, the commission of a delinquent act. Rather, it is the potential precursur of that act. Not all of the youths who come to drift also come to delinquency. Most drift back out of drift through the normal processes of finding positive aspects which affect their lives.

However, although drift is not a sufficient cause for delinquency, it is a necessary one. The juvenile must have a sense of normlessness.

Without the lowering of the sense of justice and fairness and the succeeding sense of anomie or drift, according to Matza, delinquency does not occur. Matza discusses this sense of drift at great length in his book, at present let us suffice it to say that it would seem obvious that if a youth is not alienated he would be less likely to act out.

There are two other things which are necessary before the juvenile is ready to commit a delinquent act:

Preparation (learning through experience that one can violate the prescribed rules) and desperation ("the mood of fatalism [which] . . . . . refers to the experience of seeing one's self as effect"), predispose the juvenile to the delinquent act. Delinquency is not a necessary consequence of preparation and desperation, but preparation and desperation are necessary antecedents.

It should be remembered that all juveniles are prepared almost every day to commit delinquent acts. They see others "getting away with something". They learn that it is indeed possible to cheat, or not return the library book, or worse, see and read every day that there are adults who are not required to follow the law, etc. So preparation is not a difficult thing to understand.

Desperation, is something else again. Although the feeling of being the effect rather than the cause is a very intense one, it should not be assumed that it is constant. Few youths constantly feel that they are "one down" rather than "one up." However, most , if not all youths, feel "one down" sometimes.

According to Matza, no one characteristic of the potential delinquent is sufficient although each characteristic is necessary. Desparation by itself will not cause delinquency, nor will neutralization or the sense of injustice. Rather it is the concatination or bringing together of these characteristics in one time and place that leads to the delinquent act. If the juvenile is neutralized but not desparate, or prepared but not neutralized, then there is neither sufficient nor necessary cause for delinquency according to Matza. The central concept is that delinquency is not a thing or a person, but rather that it is part of-often the end result of a process which environmentally conditions a juvenile to commit what is defined as a delinquent act. As conditions change, the juvenile will also change and will either increase or decrease delinquent behavior. The point is that a juvenile is not a "good juvenile" or a "delinquent juvenile" but rather is always floating (drifting) between the two. Further, it is the contention/ the next section of this paper the both the rate and direction of the flow (drift), is affected by the institutions with which the juvenile

interacts.

Matza'a theory has a number of interesting advantages over the subcultural delinquency and violence theories. In particular it explains why delinquents are not delinquent all of the time. Further, Matza's theories explain the hidden delinquency of the wealthy suburban areas which is always such an embarrassment to the subculturalists. In Matza's theory, wealthy suburban youths would also be prone to the feelings of injustice, neutralization, preparation, and desperation. They might even be more prone to preparation since they are in a society which knows how to handle the system and is peopled by adults who manipulate that system to their own advantage. However, the suburban delinquent is also more sophisticated in terms of how to act out. The acting out is more commonly psychological and manipulative than violent.

The School's Role in Drift.

The major emphasis of this section will be to describe the school in terms of its basic sociological patterns. The school insists that acceptable behavior is quiet, calm, neat, clean, punctual, and generally nice. This pattern is easier for girls, suburban, rural children, and children from generally uncrowded and non-noisey environments. Children who come from those sorts of surroundings or have those characteristics in their lives in the greater society, find it easier to meld into the school society since their behavior can be the same in the institution and outside of it. However, boys, urban children and children from crowded and noisey environments are viewed as disruptive in the school for behaviors which are considered normal outside the school. It is this paper's contention that this descrepancy in roles as played outside of the institution and inside it increase the potentiality for drift.

Of particular interest is the way in which schools define deviance and the way in which mental typienists define deviance or mental illness. Studies have been done to show the difference between the two since the early 1940's. They have been repeated several times and have always come up with approximately the same conclusions.

Teachers tend to list overt behaviors as the most serious, while mental hygienists view withdrawal as most serious. Hayes has listed these behaviors in order of importance to teachers and a definite interference to learning in the classroom.

1. Whispering (against class usage, creating a disturbance).
2. Paying attention to another student instead of to the work at hand.
3. Unnecessary noise, hitting pencil on desk, dropping books, etc.
4. Talking aloud (against class usage, creating a disturbance).
5. Laughing so as to disturb others, making queer noises, whistling.
6. Moving without permission, wandering around.
7. "Wisecrack," asking questions, making silly remarks.
8. Direct disobedience to authority (for example, refusing to move when told...)
9. Refusal to answer, obvious withdrawal.

23. .....Obvious Withdrawal[1]

The important fact is not what the teachers thought was important, but rather that the mental hygienists list was almost the exact opposite of the teachers. It again should be pointed out that children who are female, upper class, suburban and live in uncrowded and quiet conditions will more easily fit into the mold which we have described.

The School Violence and Drift

When all of these theories are taken into account, there should be certain correlations between what happens in the school and what happens in violence and delinquency. I would like to point to three studies which I have completed over the past 6 or 7 years.

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[1]Hayes, Margret L, " A Study in Classroom Disturbances of Eighth grade Boys and Girls" Teachers College Contribution to Education, Columbia University Press NY, 1943. p. 20.

The first study involved hidden delinquency. Incident files of unreported crimes are kept by many suburban police departments and are listings of crimes committed and youths apprehended. However, no formal action was ever taken. Of the crimes listed in these suburban police incident files, of which there was no official record in the County Probation Department, had 450 cases of arson, a host of drug related offenses, shop lifting, etc. The cases did not include dependency, or person in need of supervision. When these hidden delinquency cases were added to the officially reported cases, the suburban area had the same crime rate as the worst census tract of the core area of the inner city. The myth of suburban crimelessness is indeed a myth. It should be pointed out too that this pattern supports Matza's theory that criminality and violence is not a factor of social class.

The second study involved the relationship of socio-economic variables bases on census data for a school and the school's delinquency rate. When the schools on their overall socio-economic status, there was no correlation with the delinquency rate. However, the graduates and the students were asked to rank the schools in terms of their social status, athletic status, academic status, etc., we found that the schools that were considered "best" by the students had the lowest delinquency rates, those that were ranked in the middle had average delinquency rates. This was determined after partial correlations were performed to factor out the census-socio-economic status.

What this seemed to point to was the degree of influence of the school on the behavior of the youths. This was not surprising and frankly was what we expected to find, since it was our contention that the school has a great influence on the youth, due to the large amount of time the youth spends there, and the amount of power exercised by the school.

The final study which has not been completed, seems clearly to indicate that delinquency rates fluctuate in relationship to the school year. It has always been

assumed that delinquency would go up during the summer and over Christmas since the youths were not busy at school and had too much time on their hands. On the contrary? On the basis of preliminary study, the delinquency rates seem to rise just before school starts, during examination times, and at grading periods. This should really not come as any great surprise since we have known for years that college age suicides occur more often at the same periods. The vandalism rate at schools also goes up at the same times.

What these three studies point out is that the school does indeed have the potential of creating its own internal violence, delinquency, and vandalism. We in education like to blame either the parents or the neighborhood or other youths. However, it may be high time that we drop those excuses and look rather at the social tone and the social expectations which we foist upon a largely unsuspecting client and an unuspecting society.

What does our institution do to children? Forget for a moment the surriculum package of our schools, and think for a moment of the social tone and the social expectations and ask, "Are our schools criminogenic?" Perhaps they are. Youths need to feel positive about themselves and their lives and we as educators and controllers of one of the most powerful institutions in their lives have a responsibility to make those lives and experiences as positive as possible. If our social expectations cause a sense of injustice then it is our responsibility to change those social expectations or to convince our clients of the values of them rather than just informing the clients of what will be expected. If our grades and academic expectations cause anxiety, frustration and drift, then it is our responsibility to change those expectations or convince the client of the need for them. In brief, it is no accident that children do violence to schools, since schools do violence to children.

Youths need more choice and less dictation. More understanding and less intolerance. But more than anything else, they need more control over their own lives in school, academically, socially, and humanly.